

**The Oak Hill Academy Model
for
“The Purpose of Education”
(what we believe and what we stand for)**

Over the years I have been a part of numerous debates over just what is an outstanding educational experience and what constitutes the best learning environment. My journey through this academic world has given me the opportunity to establish a belief system of just what elements are necessary for a quality and purposeful education.

Let’s start with a formal statement which gives the broad view of the total intellectual and physical growth of the whole child. So here goes! Is it a matter of knowing many disjointed facts, or is it the ability to gather information and to develop deep thinking? I chose the latter! Here’s my wordy textbook type of definition on what is the purpose of education.

“The purpose of education is to assist the individual in achieving the successful development of his or her innate talents and potential. The goal is to reach for the attainment of personal satisfaction while being a positive contributor to the well-being of society in general.” Notice this statement does not have a time frame since one’s education is a life-time learning experience. It is also implied that this development is a “do-it-yourself” project. In the early years, both parents and teachers are there to guide and assist. As one gets older, this should morph into guide and challenge.

I now break this down to a process which is manageable and that is more specific. I call this endeavor “Circular Determination” – the building of a person’s intellect and being. This circle has an outer rim where we find the traits which establish a person’s sense of self. Who

are you, what are your beliefs, and how do you think? The inner part of the circle is the vast array of our experiences in a full lifetime, both in school and out of a formal educational setting.

So let's start with the rim, the place where from our earliest days we are developing, changing, and growing. The circle is acting as a wheel which is dependent on all of its parts to function properly. Each is necessary if we are to have a smooth ride through life. There maybe some bumps or roadblocks, but generally self-fulfilling and worthwhile.

These anchors give us direction and stability. They are the following: (in no particular order) self-motivation, common sense, independence, perseverance, coping, decision making, self-confidence, problem solving, and the ability to help others. These are the factors which move an individual ahead - whether it be for a day, a year, or a lifetime. These compose the delivery system which allows the child to be his or her whole self.

We must give our children opportunities to develop these traits in a safe and structured setting establishing a firm foundation. Children must be able to take safe risks as a part of their learning while building on successes and learning from their mistakes. Perseverance keeps the circle moving and self-motivation builds self-confidence and a sense of independence. All these work in concert to help the wheel move slowly, but going in the right direction. Sure there will be those difficult moments, but common sense and decision-making allows for correction of the course or path.

This circular determination must include those built-in strategies to help cope with diversity and to practice good problem-solving skills. The adults in a child's life are there for guidance and to help steer the ship in the right direction. When the child is ready, the teacher/parent should appear, but the adult should be ready to move aside as soon as possible.

I always recommend to never do anything for the child which he or she can do for himself or herself. With this approach, the result will be an independent, self-confident child growing into young adulthood.

The hub of the wheel provides the fuel and energy to move forward. These are the academic and social tools necessary to build good thinking skills. The goal should be for the child to be a good critical thinker rather than a reservoir of unrelated facts ready to be regurgitated. The hub supplies a broad base of elements which allows intellect building by opening minds with the type of foundation that permits children to be creative, imaginative, capable of innovation, and able to thoughtfully analyze a problem. The core continues to feed the mind, allowing for corrections of ideas, to a deep understanding of the world of knowledge. We, therefore, cannot lose sight of the target by merely worrying about grades and things which are easily lost like memorizing facts for no useful or specific purpose. Achieving good grades certainly is a worthy goal when balanced with a deep sense of gaining knowledge and meeting one's individual potential.

The core, therefore, contains the knowledge and skills which feed the circle to advance and make headway. When the core supplies this energy, the mind kicks in and this circular determination begins to be satisfied. Each element of the rim connects to the other and continues to grow for a lifetime of learning.

What we experience in school makes up the core elements. These include the personal traits such as the ability to set goals, morals/values of the individual, taking on challenges, putting out effort, being focused as well as organized, using common sense, and staying determined. Social skills such as volunteering, displaying good character, being cooperative,

and practicing good physical /mental health contribute to the whole. The so-called academic subjects supply the major part of the knowledge-based skills along with the child's attention to interests, talents, and the wide scope of wonders our world offers.

Therefore, the energy for the rim is what good schools must concentrate on as being essential. Perhaps most of all that means teaching students how to comprehend the written word. Reading is the heart and soul of the core. If a child goes on to high school unable to read fluently, his or her chances for academic success are in great peril. We must also teach the vital skills such as educating children to speak and write well, think mathematically, process logically and clearly about science and history, ask good questions, analyze problems, and search for correct answers. Understanding the culture and language of other peoples along with a world sense of cultural literacy stretches the mind to think in constructive ways. Our country's culture and history provide the seeds for good citizenship - laying the groundwork for young people to enter into our democracy as responsible adults.

So we see that highly skilled intellectual competence comes after, not before, a child accumulates a lot of facts which fuels the intellect. Therefore, in order to be a critical, independent thinker - in order to firm up those higher-order thinking skills - a child needs a considerable amount of knowledge. The brain is still the greatest computer ever created. The more you know; the better you're able to learn. Knowledge fosters – not stifles – creativity. The more background knowledge we have, the more meaning we can develop.

After establishing the circle (rim) and core, we now need a system which establishes the direction and pathway for an enriched educational experience. Way back in 1956, B.S. Bloom developed what he called his "taxonomy of educational objectives." In (2001) it was revised and

provides us with a clear educational hierarchy which moves learning from the simple to the complex. In general the simpler abilities such as remembering are necessary for mastery of the more complex skills such as applying. In many cases, practicing more complex skills promotes mastery of simpler ones, as when analysis results in a firmer comprehension of an idea. Bloom's taxonomy gives the management system needed for a child's sense of self, circular determination fueled by knowledge and skills.

Bloom's taxonomy as a management system moves a student's thinking up the ladder of genuine reflection from basic recall, all the way through six levels, ending with the ability to formulate or create an original idea or the ability to join thoughts resulting in something different or innovative.

Let's start at the bottom rung of this hierarchy remembering that this is the map to intellectual development using the core elements to move the outer rim of "circular determination." The process starts with:

- **Remembering – The learner is able to recall, restate, and remember learned information. Examples would be recognizing, listing, describing, identify, retrieving, naming, locating, finding (i.e., Can the student recall information?)**

Next comes:

- **Understanding – The learner grasps the meaning of information by interpreting and translating what has been learned. The student can perform the following tasks. Interpreting, exemplifying, summarizing, inferring, paraphrasing, classifying, comparing, and explaining. (i.e., Can the student explain ideas or concepts?)**

Moving up the line comes:

- **Applying** – The learner makes use of information in a context different from the one in which it was learned. The student can implement, use, translate, exhibit, illustrate, apply, demonstrate, construct (i.e., Can the student see the information in another familiar situation?)

Fourth comes:

- **Analyzing** – The learner breaks learned information into its parts to best understand that information. This would involve comparing, contrasting, organizing, deconstructing, attributing, outlining, finding, structuring, debating, integrating (i.e., Can the student break information into parts to explore understandings and relationships?)

Next to last on the hierarchy is:

- **Evaluating** – The learner makes decisions based on in-depth reflection, criticism, and assessment. This involves checking, hypothesizing, critiquing, experimenting, judging, testing, detecting, monitoring (i.e., Can the student justify a decision or course of action?)

The final rung and the highest attribute is:

- **Creating** – the learner creates new ideas and information using what has been previously learned. This includes designing, constructing, planning, producing, inventing, devising, making (i.e., Can the student generate new products, ideas, or ways of viewing things?)

How the educational process moves through Bloom's taxonomy to support fulfillment of the individual's potential depends on many factors. Age, prior knowledge, and difficulty of concept must all be considered. The goal is to move up the ladder as appropriate, thus challenging the brain to stretch and think as well as strengthen for further learning. Bloom's taxonomy is therefore the pathway for a successful journey through our lifetime of intellectual fulfillment.

The goal is thinking, which develops our being while strengthening the outer rim that anchors traits which make us the genuine unique individuals that we are growing to become. These are our perseverance, self-motivation, common sense, independence, decision making, problem solving, self-confidence, ability to cope, and our obligation to help others.

Essential to completing our mission in life and self-realization is the inner core which contains the skills and knowledge which provides the energy for our wheel to move smoothly and successfully through life.

So this ends (well, really begins) Oak Hill Academy's vision of the "Purpose of Education."

I leave you with the following quotes:

"This world is but a canvas for our imaginations."

Henry David Thoreau

"He who learns but does not think is lost."

Chinese Proverb

"The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be ignited."

Plutarch

"Learning to Think, Thinking to Learn."

Pohl

"A turtle makes progress when it sticks its neck out."

Anon

In conclusion:

Academic excellence can be defined as the act of thinking well. Thinking well means that a child be given the time to ponder and to wonder, the freedom to question and to probe, the facility to articulate clearly and accurately the consequences of the query, and to use the consequences of the conclusion as a tool for growth.

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**Headmaster
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